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Soviet Diplomat Abruptly Sent Home

A Russian diplomat believed to be a KGB agent got himself mixed up in some tawdry capitalist decadence recently while drunkenly trolling for homosexual adventure a few blocks from the White House at 5 in the morning.

Within hours, the gay secret agent, Yuriy Igorevich Osipov, was shipped back to Moscow, where he may still be trying to convince KGB interrogators that his fantastic version of the affair is true. A far likelier account was obtained by my associate Les Whitten from an eyewitness to the undiplomatic episode and from a secret police report.

Osipov's "cover" at the Soviet Embassy was a job in the cultural exchange office. But it wasn't culture he was looking to exchange in the pre-dawn hours of Feb. 24, when he ventured into Malcolm X Park after a marathon drinking bout that had begun the previous evening at an embassy reception about a dozen blocks away.

Drunk and disheveled, Osipov was a most unintelligent intelligence agent even to venture into the park. It is a known hangout not only for homosexuals, but for muggers, and was the scene of a recent murder. U.S. counterespies have concluded that Osipov was probably seeking a homosexual tryst.

But there was no "probably" about

it, according to Sammie Smith, a husky 19-year-old black man who was crossing the park on the way home from a visit with his girlfriend.

Smith said the Russian was ardently importuning a known homosexual when two men started jostling him, obviously as a prelude to rolling the inebriated stranger. Smith said he talked the two out of their intended robbery and volunteered to help Osipov find some documents he had lost in the scuffle. Then he and Osipov drove off in the Russian's car.

The amorous spook "tried to grab my privates," Smith recounted. The overture was indignantly repulsed; both Smith and his friends attest that he is strictly a ladies' man.

The frustrated Russian parked outside a drugstore and tried to strangle Smith — who showed my associate bruises on his throat to prove it. Smith's testimony was also supported by a bystander, Reginald Ten Eyck, 24, who strolled over to see what was happening. "The white man was choking the brother," Ten Eyck told police.

Osipov drove off at Ten Eyck's approach, and was next spotted by a metropolitan police patrol traveling "at a high rate of speed." The cop pulled the car over at 5:20 a.m. Beyond declaring that he was a diplomat and that he had been robbed, Osipov refused any information until an embassy official, summoned by police, arrived on the scene.

The Soviet official, Vladimir Vikulov, a political officer, spoke rapidly with Osipov and then gave Detective James Pawlik this weird story: Without explaining what he had been doing in Malcolm X Park, Osipov claimed that "two black men . . . tried to make [me] perform oral sex on them." When he refused, Osipov said, he was robbed of diplomatic papers, his watch and some cash. He also claimed that Smith was involved in the robbery, but did not explain how. Smith, on probation for a drug charge, emphatically denied the charge, and indeed was not arrested.

As for the driving violation, Osipov explained through Vikulov that he hadn't been driving. "Somehow the person who drove the car hopped over from the driver's side to the passenger side" when the police car pulled them over, he said. The Russian also claimed there was a man with a knife in the back seat, who "somehow" leaped out and fled without the policeman catching sight of him.

For diplomatic reasons, the police have clamped a firm lid on the episode.

As for the Soviet Embassy, they would confirm only that Osipov had been at the embassy party and had been sent back to Moscow. Asked what happened, Vikulov murmured diplomatically, "It is difficult to judge."